

VZCZCXRO2234

PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHNP RUEHROV RUEHSL RUEHSR  
DE RUEHPG #0503/01 2390919  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 270919Z AUG 09  
FM AMEMBASSY PRAGUE  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1694  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PRAGUE 000503

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/28/2019

TAGS: PGOV EZ

SUBJECT: UNREFORMED COMMUNISTS COURT SOCIAL DEMOCRATS

REF: A. PRAGUE 313  
    B. PRAGUE 453

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Mary Thompson-Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶11. (C) Summary. Despite declining membership, the unreformed Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM) has a stable and loyal voter base that consistently garners 12 to 15 percent of the vote and makes them the Czech Republic's third largest party. KSCM currently has 26 seats in the Chamber of Deputies (the lower house) and current polls indicate they will get between 24 and 29 seats in the early parliamentary elections on October 9 - 10. The party's platform is laden with social spending, calls for halting Czech troop deployments overseas and calls for no American military presence in the Czech Republic. KSCM Chairman Vojtech Filip made public overtures to the center-left Social Democrats (CSSD) about a possible post-election coalition, but Jiri Paroubek, CSSD's Chairman, has stated publicly that a coalition with the Communists (silent or otherwise) is "impossible at this time." KSCM has never been able to participate in a formal government coalition because it is a political pariah, although the Social Democrats (CSSD) have worked with KSCM in the past on certain pieces of legislation important to left wing parties and have coalitions with KSCM on a regional level. If CSSD and its main rival, the center-right Civic Democrats (ODS) finish close as is expected, then a grand coalition becomes a more viable option, but Paroubek may have Presidential aspirations and he has always been willing to renege on a promise. End Summary.

-----  
Party of Pensioners  
-----

¶12. (SBU) The current unreformed Communist Party (KSCM) is a direct successor of the previous communist party (KSCM) that ruled the Czech Republic from 1948 to 1989. The KSCM never "reformed" after the Velvet Revolution even though Vaclav Havel's tolerant approach to politics included accommodating the KSCM. In some other Central European countries, including Hungary and Poland, Communists transformed and reemerged in a social democratic guise after 1989. This did not happen to Czech Communists. This was partially due to the fact that the purge of reform-minded Communist Party members after the 1968 Prague Spring left the party without a reformist element, and partially due to the Czech Communist Party's deep and strong historical roots, even prior to World War II. The party's failure to reform helped pave the way for the emergence of today's center-left CSSD.

¶13. (SBU) KSCM has a very loyal and stable voter base that consistently keeps them in parliament and makes them the third largest party in the country. In 2002, for example, despite a voter turnout of only 58%, KSCM had its best result ever: 18.5 percent of the vote. Currently they have 26 seats in the 200-seat Chamber of Deputies (12.8 percent of the vote). Polls consistently give them between 12 and 15 percent of the vote, which would translate into between 24 and 29 seats in the lower house. Their voter base, however,

is aging and declining. In a survey conducted by the Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences and the University of Virginia for a report released in January 2009, 71 percent of KSCM's supporters were aged 58 or older.

¶4. (SBU) The average age of a KSCM member is 69 and approximately 70% of KSCM's members are at least 70 years old. Roughly two-thirds of the party's members have been members for more than 40 years. Membership has been steadily declining since 1989. In 2004, KSCM had approximately 100,000 members. Last year, that number had decreased to 75,000. Some analysts say that it is just a matter of time before the party base dies off. According to the analysis of Lukas Linek of the Czech Academy of Sciences, KSCM will not fall below the 5 percent parliamentary threshold for at least 15 more years.

¶5. (SBU) Yet despite the decline of official members, the KSCM consistently polls between 12 to 15 percent, defying predictions of its impending demise. Many analysts attribute this to support from voters who are to the left of CSSD on the political spectrum, and from less leftist voters who are otherwise disillusioned with CSSD and Paroubek.

-----  
A Party Platform with No Surprises  
-----

¶6. (SBU) KSCM's party platform is no surprise, focusing on state intervention in the economy, nationalized industries and opposition to further privatization, and opposition to the U.S. and NATO. Some of the prominent planks are:

PRAGUE 00000503 002 OF 003

- increasing the minimum labor wage to 14,000 CZK/month (about 750 USD);
- increasing the minimum state pension of 10,000 CZK/month (about 550 USD);
- eliminating all health care fees;
- stopping all university fees at state universities, achievement stipends of 5,000 CZK/month (about 275 USD);
- maternity leave for 3 years with a 14,000 CZK/month (about 750 USD) payment;
- stopping privatization of the state pension fund, as well as health and prison services;
- halting privatization of the quasi-state electric company (CEZ), airport, railway, post office, etc;
- stopping foreign deployments of the Czech military; and
- preventing any American military presence on Czech soil.

¶7. (SBU) When CSSD released its election platform, its main rival, the center-right ODS, immediately stamped it with a sickle and hammer, claiming strong similarities between the KSCM's and CSSD's platforms. Both parties have, indeed, called for increased minimum wages and monthly pensions. The CSSD has called for the elimination of some health fees but not all. And while the CSSD still support foreign troop deployments, they too are opposed to American troops on Czech soil.

-----  
KSCM's Attempted Rapprochement with CSSD  
-----

¶8. (C) KSCM Chairman Vojtech Filip has taken a somewhat pragmatic approach to cooperation with CSSD. The two parties have worked on legislation in the past (for example, a bill on sick benefits, a law reforming social benefits) and will probably continue to have ad hoc cooperation in order to push through some of CSSD's legislative proposals. Genuine rapprochement will continue to elude KSCM because the conservatives within KSCM want to preserve the anti-reformist status quo within the party. According to Vladimir Handl of the Institute for International Relations, a Czech think tank, rapprochement with CSSD and the entrenched attitude of

the hard-liners are "divisive issues" within KSCM.

¶9. (SBU) Evidence of Filip's pragmatic approach can be seen in his recent overtures to CSSD. On July 28, Filip offered to apologize again for the Communist Party's past, if this would open the door to a coalition with CSSD. He said that KSCM is willing to repeat its December 20, 1989 apology in which it referenced the 1968 Prague Spring uprising and the injustices to the Charter 77 signatories. The party was also willing to acknowledge the inviolability of ownership rights as well as membership in the European Union. Filip was aloof about whether the party would acknowledge the inviolability of the Czech Republic's membership in NATO, but no one realistically believes he would. All these were preconditions laid out by CSSD leader Paroubek for formal collaboration with the Communists at the national level.

¶10. (C) Even though Paroubek hinted previously that a "silent" coalition with KSCM could be possible, he later stated publicly that a coalition with the Communists is "impossible at this time." At the time of Filip's offer, CSSD Vice Chairman Zdenek Skromach insisted that the Bohumin Resolution not be rescinded. (Comment: The Bohumin Resolution, signed at the CSSD Party Congress in Bohumin, North Moravia in 1995, banned cooperation with the Communists at the national level. End Comment) Coalition with the Communists is still considered unacceptable by many in CSSD because of the KSCM's continuation of cold-war anti-Western rhetoric, its class-struggle ideology, the party's past history and role -- and its name. Political analyst Vladimira Dvorakova believes that KSCM's overture provided an opportunity to CSSD for "Mitterandization" of the Communist party, referring to French President Mitterand's tactical move in 1981 to integrate the Communists of France into the socialist government, eventually eliminating the radical left competitor.

-----  
Comment - The Road to the Castle Could be Red  
-----

¶11. (C) The November 20th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution will rekindle memories and emotions that the Communist Party will want to avoid. (Note: KSCM Chairman Filip criticized Czech public television for airing the 1950 show trial and subsequent trip to the gallows of Milada Horakova a few days before the European Parliament elections. The Horakova trial was one of the most notorious of the communist-era Czechoslovakia, and Filip complained because he said it would influence voters right before the EP elections. End Note) Despite their apology, many Czechs warily view

PRAGUE 00000503 003 OF 003

KSCM as only half reformed at best; many other Czechs completely reject the party. While the KSCM's success in the October 2008 regional elections allowed them to serve in a formal coalition with CSSD in two regions, a national coalition in parliament is a different story. More than likely, KSCM's cooperation with CSSD on the national level will remain issue-oriented, ad hoc and definitely low key. Polls indicate that the election will result in a close finish between the two large parties - CSSD and the ODS - with two other small parties (the Christian Democrats and the new TOP 09 party) also making it into parliament. This result would increase the chance for a grand coalition between CSSD and ODS. Paroubek has publicly disavowed a coalition with the KSCM for fear of voter backlash. However, as Jan Hamacek of CSSD told Emboff, Paroubek's ultimate goal is the Presidency, and even center-right President Klaus cozied up to the KSCM to gain their support for his Presidential bid and move to Prague Castle. Such a move would be much less of a stretch for the CSSD's opportunistic Jiri Paroubek. End Comment.

Thompson-Jones